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ABSTRACT

Educators should be encouraged to develop elementary school students' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the visual arts in an integrated approach to curriculum development in the schools. Instruction in the visual arts is frequently presented in isolation from other subjects, but resources are available to support reinforcement in other curriculum areas. Among these resources are picture books, a tried and true method of introducing children to the visual arts. Several cooperative art programs that integrate art education and other disciplines are described. Various specialists need to plan an integrated arts curriculum that brings together the combined skills of teachers, artists, parents, and others committed to achieving objectives in the visual arts for children. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

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Visual Literacy Through the Visual Arts

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Visual Literacy Through the Visual Arts

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Introduction

Sinatra (1986) has explored the primary role of visual literacy in the development of other verbal, nonverbal and computer literacies through the interaction of three basic components - viewing, exploration, and nonverbal representation. His research provides a theoretical foundation for the infusion of the arts, including the visual arts, into the school curriculum. Sinatra (1986, p. 43) states:

> Educational practices must be widened to include a more enlightened process perspective embracing the arts and a readmittance of the basic nonverbal curriculum that was an early, essential part of youngster's lives. By so doing we will restore the components of visual literacy to an influential role in shaping creative thought.

With the current emphasis on integrated language arts curricula, educators from the various disciplines, including elementary classroom and art teachers, school library media specialists and computer literacy coordinators, should also be encouraged to address methods for developing elementary students' knowledge, understandings and appreciations of the visual arts in an integrated approach to curriculum development in the schools. Many elementary schools lack even basic visual arts instruction. These schools may have no art professional available or share the expertise of one art educator among schools. Instruction in the visual arts is frequently presented in isolation from the language arts curriculum since art periods are used to provide classroom teachers with planning time. As a result, visual arts instruction is not reinforced in other key areas of the curriculum.

Resources available in the schools to support a visual arts curriculum include a wide range of picture books. Lacy (1986) focused attention upon award winning picture books as a means of introducing children to the visual arts. Through

picture books teachers, library media specialists, art teachers and parents can integrate literature in the curriculum while developing children's abilities to understand artistic design, art history and criticism. Lacy's analysis of the Caldecott Award books in use of artistic design elements provides a foundation for an integrated visual arts curriculum in the schools. Her work should be required reading for all elementary educators. Children's experiences with art in picture books provide many opportunities for discussion of a range of visual arts concepts.

The Arts Education Curriculum

Educators considering the development of an integrated visual arts curriculum should consider aspects of the art curriculum to be included such as art making, art history, aesthetics, art history and multicultural or global education. Children's picture books, works of art, and other selected art products should be available in the school library media center to support the integration of the visual arts in language arts, social studies, science and other curricular areas. The following studies are useful in addressing the scope and content of an integrated curriculum.

Clark (1991) reviewed three major art education curriculum orientations, including child-centered, society-centered, and subject-centered. His review is helpful in addressing the theoretical foundations in art education. The child-centered orientation emphasizes the the development of the child's abilities and capacity for self-expression in art. Society-centered orientation places emphasis on a community's needs for teaching children social values and addressing broad social problems such as environmental education and multicultural, multiethnic or global education. The subject-centered orientation to art education places emphasis on art making, aesthetics, art criticism and art history. He observed that these curriculum orientations co-exist in educational programs and are reflected in many art art textbooks.

Stanford (1990) in her discussion of discipline-based art education encourages elementary teachers to provide a curriculum which develops students' abilities to see visually and culturally. Her discussion includes utilizing a wide range of art work from a variety of modern and contemporary sources and in a variety of formats from quilts to Japanese prints. She notes, "Five-year olds can discern different kinds of lines, shapes, textures, sizes, two-or-three dimensionality et cetera and can tell you how they respond to them (1990, p. 18)."

Zimmerman (1990) reviewed the teaching of art from a global perspective as a means of developing understanding and appreciation of differences within cultures. She reviewed community-based art programs which integrated Afro-American history and art. Arts programs included speakers from different ethnic groups. Her study explored issues in developing a global perspective in art education.

Hagaman (1990) addressed aesthetics, or the philosophy of art, in the art curriculum. She advocates the discussion of art as a means of encouraging children to explain why

they think as they do. For example, what criteria should be used to judge realism in a work of art if the child prefers realistic art work? Such discussion should focus on active listening and willingness to consider the opinions of others.

Cooperative Art Programs

Concerned educators and parents have addressed the need for cooperative efforts in providing elementary age students with art experiences integrated into language arts and library information skills curricula. Sinatra (1986) successfully employed visual communications in the language arts curriculum. His literature review also outlines successful applications of photography, including Polaroid's Education Project and Kodak's Cameras in the Curriculum Project.

Although working with gifted students from grades seven through nine, Darlington (1992) reported on a writing class which integrated a visual and verbal curriculum. She concluded, "Indeed, visual literacy could provide a basis for writing experiences"(1992, p. 192). Students participating in this summer program for gifted and talented discussed and analyzed art, developed artists' profiles and experienced quality literature as part of the writing process.

Kula (1989) and others developed examples of various teaching methods designed to aid Arizona educators in integrating visual arts lessons in an integrated curriculum. The authors provided sample art objectives and methods for achieving objectives through related themes in language arts, science, and other curricular areas. Discussion includes a planning model which utilizes three visual arts skills components: art in cultural heritage, aesthetic assessment and creative art expression. Their sample lesson plans include the use of picture books as springboards for art, reading, writing and research activities. Arizona State Department of Education's classroom teaching guides, published as *Arizona Visual Arts Skills* provides a curricular guide and activities for kindergarten through secondary school. The guide is a useful curriculum model in developing learning objectives. The State of California's (Lundin, 1989) guide to developing a framework for the visual and performing arts is also a useful tool in defining an arts curriculum.

Papke (1993) and others developed a Children's Art Network to support, promote and develop art enrichment opportunities in public schools which did not have visual arts programs. An art through the curriculum project provides teachers with integrated art activities, based upon children's picture books and other media, to achieve curricular objectives.

Epstein and Dauber (1989) reported the results of a three year project to provide middle school teachers with methods for developing a program integrating art and social studies. The project included parents in roles as volunteers to present lessons on well-known works of arts. The project linked art appreciation, history and criticism to the middle school curriculum. The authors concluded that an integrated approach to art education was useful in developing students' art

awareness, when art education programs are not well developed.

Overby (1990) and others focused on the role of the arts in the early childhood curriculum. Educators interested in designing an integrated visual arts curriculum will find relevant discussion on child development, arts assessment and curriculum development presented at an early childhood conference on the creative arts. Attention is also given to model programs and multicultural/global program development.

The federally-funded Kansas Arts Resource Training System (1988) provided technical assistance and in-service training to educators, therapists and parents in integrating the arts into the curriculum for special education students. The plan provided for trained resource coordinators who provided technical assistance and training in the arts to participants. The final grant report provides information relevant to developing similar efforts in other school districts.

Picture Books in the Curriculum

Teachers now utilize a wide variety of children's picture books in the language arts curriculum. Outstanding picture books serve as vehicles for a variety of communications activities, including choral reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing. Picture books can also provide a springboard for talking about artistic design and experimenting with different media in the classroom and library media center. Cooperative planning between the art teacher, classroom teachers and library media professionals can provide opportunities for reinforcing and extending experiences in the regular classroom and library media center.

Lacy (1986) provides discussion of themes, design elements, biographical information, and analysis of art works which teachers can apply in integrating visual materials in the language arts, social studies and science curricula. She asserts:

> The world can be a visual delight-and so can the works of art that mirror it. The visual arts can be a lifelong wonderment and source of pleasure, and one's ability to enjoy them is enhanced by an understanding of the artistic elements, including line, color, light and dark, shape, space, and texture and their effects on the audience (1986, p. 1).

Each artistic element has a vocabulary of its own. Take, for example, the vocabulary associated with color. We speak of colors as primary, secondary and tertiary colors. Color concepts include hues, shades and tints. Colors can be warm or cool. Color can be used to create shapes and textures. Colors serve as a means of communication, as in red light/green light. We use color concepts to describe feelings or emotions, such as we turn blue with cold. Adults and children can learn the language of color and other artistic elements through planned interactions with quality picture books.

Concepts: Example Brian Wildsmith's *The Rich Man and the Shoe-maker.*

Color:

1. uses color and space to define shape;
2. uses primary, secondary and tertiary colors; heavy use of reds, purples and pinks;
3. uses uneven applications of color to achieve texture;

Shape:

1. uses geometric shapes to create forms and patterns;

Style:

1. cubist; color and shape unify the work

An art teacher, a classroom teacher and a library media specialist in a local school collaborated in developing an integrated language arts/art unit. The unit provided activities for reinforcing and extending art and language skills based upon Brian Wildsmith's richly abstract picture books. His *The Rich Man and the Shoemaker* with its heavy use of color and shapes provided an excellent vehicle for reinforcing and discussing art concepts such as abstract/realistic, primary colors, geometric shapes, texture, pattern and placement which are concepts introduced in the school district's kindergarten and first grade art curriculum.

Children compared and contrasted the characters in the story, utilizing both text and illustrations. They hypothesized about theme and story elements, such as why a fierce dog appears in scenes with the rich man while shy kittens and a host of birds and animals flock to the poor man's home. After sharing several of Wildsmith's fables, children generated storylines with the help of the teacher and dictated their stories. An aide recorded the story for each child in booklet format. Children in small groups were provided with paper shapes (circles, squares and triangles) and paints to produce their art products. With the library media specialist, the children also sought out information about the illustrator to share with the class. The library media specialist added their books to a circulating collection of peer produced materials.

As educators concerned with the development of visual literacy skills, we should address methods and materials for providing quality visual arts experiences for our children as an integral part of the teaching/learning experience. Various specialists need to plan an integrated arts curriculum which brings to bear the combined skills of teachers, artists, parents and others committed to achieving goals and objectives in the visual arts for all our children.

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